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SUBJECT: IRAQ'S SCIRI PARTY HOLDS CONFERENCE, CHANGES ITS
NAME

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor Charles O. Blaha for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

Different Name, Same Face

¶1. (SBU) The Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) held a party conference at its Baghdad headquarters on May 10 and 11. According to SCIRI contacts, several hundred people attended, including national and provincial leaders of SCIRI and the organizations under its umbrella (including Badr Organization, Sayyid al-Shuhada, and Shahid al-Mihrab). SCIRI decided to change its name to the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council (al-majlis al-alya al-Islami al-Iraqi; SCII); joked the assistant to Abdelaziz al-Hakim, "We don't need a revolution in Iraq anymore." To no one's surprise, al-Hakim was re-elected as chairman of SCII, and several SCIRI members said that there were no significant leadership changes in SCII's umbrella organizations.

The Platform

¶2. (SBU) SCII issued a statement following the conference that laid out a 49-point platform covering a wide range of economic, political, security, and social issues. These points included:

- The important role of Iraq's marja'iyah, particularly Ayatollah al-Sistani.
- Support for democracy, the constitution, and the Maliki government.
- Implementation of federalism according to the constitution and will of the people
- Calling for all sides to commit to legal international decisions concerning Iraq's borders with respect to historical borders with Kuwait, Iran, and other countries.
- Noting that the presence of MNF-I is temporary and calling for speeding up the training of ISF.
- Passage of the hydrocarbon law and related legislation and improving the investment climate.

A SCII Member's Readout

¶3. (C) SCIRI CoR member Ridha Jawad Taqi told PolOff that al-Hakim was pleased with subsequent press coverage that characterized the statement as a change from a vision centered on Ayatollah Khomeini's wilayat al-faqih (rule by religious jurisprudence) to a vision oriented toward Iraqi marja'iyah and democratic institutions. Asked whether the Iranians had any reaction, Taqi said that the Iranian Ambassador visited SCII the following day to complain about the press coverage and to ask why Iran had not received special mention for its role in opposing Saddam Hussein.

(Note: SCIRI issued a press release May 12 that noted there had been "incorrect analysis" of its statement in the media and mentioned Iran in particular as at the top of the list of countries that stood against Saddam. End note.)

14. (C) Taqi said that the conference ratified several important structural changes, expanding SCII's larger coordinating body, the "ha'a aama," to 150 members (from approximately 65) and setting the number on the central council ("shura markaziya") at 21, elected from the ha'a aama.

Comment

15. (C) SCII's change of name and adoption of a platform supporting Iraq's democratic and religious institutions are significant symbolically and also clever politically. SCII's leaders are aware that its association with Iran is a political liability that parties such as Fadhila are exploiting. By changing its name and acknowledging Sistani as the leading marja', SCII is positioning itself to counter criticism that it is a party of Iranian-backed former exiles. Association with Sistani is also a tried and true political strategy, albeit one with the potential to backfire, at least privately, if Sistani's ire is raised by use of his name without permission. The commitment to democracy enshrined in SCII's platform is not new, as it echoes repeated public statements by al-Hakim. While the platform is important as another symbol of SCII's commitment, actions will speak louder than words, and SCII's detractors are skeptical that the platform represents any real change.
CROCKER